

Abstract

Focussing on the **urban** heart of the 1861 edition of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*, this **ecocritical** analysis is concerned with the poetic consequences of **placelessness** in 'Les Sept Vieillards' and 'Les Petites Vieilles'. Establishing a link between **versification** and **environmental alteration**, the unsettling diptych can be perceived as evoking a threshold for **place identity** amid Haussmann's modernization of Paris.

By the mid-1850s, Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann's restructuring works were coming to define Paris (the Rue de Rivoli was developed between 1853 and 1855, and the Boulevard St Michel was constructed between 1855 and 1859). The project was founded on a desire to prevent insurrectionary barricades, enhance the health of the Parisian populace, and bring the form of the city into the modern age as an emblem of the power of Napoleon III. Appointed Prefect of the Seine *département* in 1853, Haussmann undertook the modernization of Paris by demolishing older parts of the city, replacing squalid tenements and winding streets with grand structures and broad boulevards. Haussmann notes that this process coincided with the idealistic spirit of progress in the Second Empire: 'l'exécution des diverses opérations [...] de 1858 à 1859 [...] était l'événement du Vieux Paris, du quartier des émeutes, des barricades, par une large voie centrale, perçant, de part en part, ce dédale presque impraticable'.¹ In slightly over fifteen years, Haussmann fundamentally reconfigured the city at a cost of over two billion francs, displacing over a quarter of a million people (especially from areas around Les Halles). These demolition and construction works were greeted with varying degrees of hesitation by residents who felt that their home was no longer recognizable. Edmond de Goncourt describes the unsettling atmosphere of the transitioning city on 18 November 1860:

Mon Paris, le Paris où je suis né, le Paris des mœurs de 1830 à 1848 s'en va. Il s'en va par le matériel, il s'en va par le moral. La vie sociale y fait une grande évolution [...]. Je suis étranger à ce qui vient, à ce qui est, comme à ces boulevards nouveaux sans tournant, [...] implacables de ligne droite, qui ne sentent plus le monde de Balzac, qui font penser à quelque Babylone [...] de l'avenir. Il est bête de venir en un temps en construction, l'âme y a des malaises comme un corps qui essuierait des plâtres.²

This vanishing of the older incarnation of Paris in material and moral terms entailed uncertainty about the relationship of humanity to the environment. It was amid this structural and social upheaval that Baudelaire sought to eke out an existence while refining his only collection of verse, *Les Fleurs du mal* (first published on 25 June 1857).

Condemned by the moral authorities of the Second Empire for his tales of the disturbing elements of metropolitan life, Baudelaire was obliged to excise six poems containing elements of vampirism and lesbianism two months after the release of the collection. The thirty-six-year-old author resolved to issue a new version of the work, reconceived in its entirety, and the second edition of *Les Fleurs du mal* was published on 9 February 1861. Its structure was bolstered by the addition of thirty-five poems to the ninety-four permitted pieces, as well as by the creation of a groundbreaking second section, the 'Tableaux parisiens'.³ Following the eighty-five *ennui*-infused accounts in the first section ('Spleen et idéal'), the eighteen urban vignettes of the 'Tableaux parisiens' offer a variegated sketch of Parisian society undergoing Haussmann's modernization projects, and presage the desire to flee the trappings of everyday life in the four concluding sections

¹ Georges-Eugène Haussmann, *Mémoires du Baron Haussmann*, 3 vols (Paris: Victor-Havard, 1890-93), III (1893), 54.

² Edmond de Goncourt & Jules de Goncourt, *Journal des Goncourt: Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, 9 vols (Paris: Charpentier, 1891-96), I (1891), 346.

³ Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by C. Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1975-76), I (1975), 82-104.

(‘Le Vin’; ‘Fleurs du mal’; ‘Révolte’; ‘La Mort’). The lowly protagonists of the ‘Tableaux parisiens’ (ranging from a red-haired beggar-girl to seven old men) are situated alongside the self-conscious narrator as part of an urban life-cycle. The metrocentric section heralds the threshold that Baudelaire was approaching at the end of the 1850s, as he began the transition to the prose poetry of *Le Spleen de Paris* (published posthumously on 19 June 1869).

‘Les Sept Vieillards’ and ‘Les Petites Vieilles’, two of the most innovative pieces in the ‘Tableaux parisiens’, unfold amid the urban jumble of Haussmannian Paris. Marked by the spectre of marginalization and the homogenizing influence of the crowd, these two anthropocentric vignettes foreground the struggle between tradition and progress that the latter half of the nineteenth century encapsulates. David Harvey dissects Baudelaire’s complicated relationship with tradition:

There is a contradiction in Baudelaire’s sense of modernity after the bittersweet experience of creative destruction on the barricades [...] in 1848. Tradition has to be overthrown, violently if necessary, in order to grapple with the present and create the future. But the loss of tradition wrenches away the [...] anchors of our understanding and leaves us drifting, powerless.⁴

In ‘Les Sept Vieillards’ and ‘Les Petites Vieilles’, the old-world values embodied by the elderly men and women are juxtaposed with the modernizing world of the city, highlighting the powerlessness and blurred identities at the heart of the abjection of Baudelaire’s protagonists. As the narrator immerses himself in the heterotopic spaces of Paris, a creeping atmosphere of powerlessness raises questions about the effects of urban life on humanity and communication. William Sharpe asserts that the ‘Tableaux parisiens’ are ‘the climax of Baudelaire’s confrontation with the disintegratory forces of urban life’.⁵ Implying a transference of uncertainty from physical space to poetic space, the troubling descriptions and prosody of ‘Les Sept Vieillards’ and ‘Les Petites Vieilles’ upset reassuring preconceptions of stability based on an optimistic vision of progress by bringing to light blurred identities and disintegrated connections.

Evoking the homogenizing effects of urban life, the nigh identical figures in ‘Les Sept Vieillards’ and ‘Les Petites Vieilles’ indicate a mistrustful attitude towards the positivity of modernization. Baudelaire’s unease about the mutating metropolis is channelled through the discomfiting prosody of the moments in which he is confronted with the disorientating spectres of a traditional past in the new incarnation of Paris. The sense of non-belonging embodied by the seven old men and the little old women relates to the swirling rush of crowds and progress that suffuses the energetic and complex drama of the ‘Tableaux parisiens’. James Lawler asserts that the section ‘breaks with the solitude of salon, bedroom, study to confront the modern city [...]. A new lesson is learned in the urban landscape: [...] successive moments of expansion and contraction govern the man who regards his fellow citizens with fraternal compassion’.⁶ The expansiveness of Baudelaire’s verse arises from prosodic peculiarities that challenge the confines of the alexandrine. Pursuing the hypothesis that the structure of poetry is influenced by environmental alterations, the shifting structure of a number of keystone pieces in the 1861 edition of *Les Fleurs du mal* can be equated to the demolition of the sinuous streets of old Paris in favour of capacious boulevards.

Paralleling modernizing changes in the physical landscape, the rhythmic structure of verse became progressively unstable in the nineteenth century, as poets began to depart from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century models. The commonplace structure of an alexandrine marked by medial accentuation between two hexasyllabic hemistichs was called into question by the use of the *e caduc*

⁴ David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 15.

⁵ William C. Sharpe, *Unreal Cities: Urban Figuration in Wordsworth, Baudelaire, Whitman, Eliot, and Williams* (Baltimore, NJ: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 40.

⁶ James R. Lawler, *Poetry and Moral Dialectic: Baudelaire’s ‘Secret Architecture’* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997), pp. 186-87.

at the caesura in Romantic verse, as well as by the emergence of the *alexandrin trimètre* (containing three tetrasyllabic units) as an alternative rhythm. The verse of Victor Hugo and Théophile Gautier (Baudelaire's chief predecessors) often breaks from the classical understanding of the caesura, demonstrating that the alexandrine was becoming more fluid in the era preceding the publication of *Les Fleurs du mal*. This progressive deterritorialization of poetic space is perpetuated through Baudelaire's expansive concept of his art, symbolized by the peculiarities of versification in the 'Tableaux parisiens'. David Evans notes that 'the verse poems composed during 1858-59, added to the 1861 edition, mark in both their content and their form a radical departure from the 1857 edition'.⁷ The poems composed for the 1861 edition inventively foreground the difficulties of the transition to modernity for Paris and its inhabitants. The extraordinary presences in the 'Tableaux parisiens' demonstrate that there is something momentous at stake for poetry in the changing form of the city. In order to get to the heart of the upheaval that Baudelaire's verse encompasses, it is helpful to consider it from an ecocritical perspective, using the optic of place identity.

Spatial and relational knowledge is developed through familiarization with fixed topographic referents, around which our everyday existence and movements revolve. The reconfiguration of a familiar setting consequently represents a quasi-traumatic event, involving a feeling of disconnectedness that is proportional to the magnitude of the personal association with the bygone incarnation of a site. Edward Relph espouses the idea of 'placelessness' as a way of conceptualizing the debilitating consequences of 'the weakening of distinct and diverse experiences and identities of places'⁸ on human consciousness. The narrator and several of the protagonists in the 'Tableaux parisiens' exhibit the effects of weakened place identities: they find it difficult to inhabit Paris, despite their longstanding relationship with the city. Instead of dwelling-places, Baudelaire's vision of the mutating metropolis evokes anonymous and anonymizing spaces that cannot sustain the figures who move through them, leading to the type of disorientation and estrangement identified by Relph: 'existential outsidership involves a self-conscious and reflective [...] alienation from people and places, homelessness, a sense of the unreality of the world, and of not belonging'.⁹ The descriptions and versification of 'Les Sept Vieillards' and 'Les Petites Vieilles' are characterized by the negative consequences of encounters with alterity, since the prosodic volatility of the diptych increases according to the level of destabilization in the narrator's surroundings. The unsettling content and form of the two poems thus bear the hallmarks of a quasi-infernal atmosphere of anonymization and disconnection, provoked by the metamorphosing structure of Paris.

The *dépaysement* at the heart of Baudelaire's verse can be psychogeographically illuminated by Marc Augé's proposal that 'jamais [...] les repères d'identification collective n'ont été aussi fluctuants'.¹⁰ The 'Tableaux parisiens' evoke fluctuations in comforting points of reference, since the heterotopic spaces of modernizing Paris lack the traits of the older elements of the city that stimulated identification. In contrast to the reassuring qualities of time-weathered places, the spaces of Baudelaire's verse are steeped in an atmosphere of rootlessness, disconnectedness and ambiguous identities. Augé observes that '[la] pluralité des lieux [...] et l'effet de "dépaysement" qui en résulte [...] introduisent entre le voyageur-spectateur et l'espace du paysage qu'il parcourt ou contemple une rupture qui l'empêche d'y voir un lieu, de s'y retrouver pleinement'.¹¹ Embodying environmental changes, Baudelaire's verse encompasses several unsettling aspects that evoke the peculiarity of the rewoven fabric of Paris due to Haussmann's remodelling works. By focussing on the traces of

⁷ David E. Evans, *Rhythm, Illusion and the Poetic Idea: Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), p. 81.

⁸ Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), p. 6.

⁹ Relph, *Placelessness*, p. 51.

¹⁰ Marc Augé, *Non-lieux: Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), p. 51.

¹¹ Augé, *Non-lieux*, p. 108.

placelessness in ‘Les Sept Vieillards’ and ‘Les Petites Vieilles’, it is possible to shed new light on the scope of Baudelaire’s changing relationship to societal and prosodic tenets in the 1861 edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*.

Taking into account elements of Baudelaire’s versification that can be interpreted as enacting urban experience during Haussmannization, this ecocritical analysis will use ‘Les Sept Vieillards’ as an exemplar of key prosodic devices that can be linked to place identity, before considering the reconfiguration of the expressive resources of the alexandrine in ‘Les Petites Vieilles’ from the perspective of placelessness and metropolitan ecology. Focussing on ‘Les Sept Vieillards’, the three features that will be scrutinized as indicators of diminishing referents in poetic space are: first, the submersion of the caesura in the flow of a line due to the elision of an *e caduc*, creating a tighter juncture between the sixth and seventh syllables that diminishes medial accentuation; second, enjambement within and between stanzas (along with concomitant *rejets* and *contre-rejets*), involving sense overflowing prosodic boundaries; third, the strategic use of rhyme that is not *riche* or *léonine*, indicating a weakening of the borders of verse. The initial two of these three devices evoke increased fluidity in Baudelaire’s verse due to the diminution of traditional markers of rhythm. Instances of meagre rhymes augment this phenomenon, as they insinuate degradation in poetic space because of their decreased richness. Taken together, these structural aspects are suggestive of an evolving relationship between versification and environmental factors in Baudelaire’s later verse. It will ultimately be demonstrated that the prosodic mechanisms at the heart of the ‘Tableaux parisiens’ indicate a threshold for poetry that is analogous to the material transition represented by Haussmann’s reconfiguration of Paris.

***Les Fleurs du mal*, XC, ‘Les Sept Vieillards’**

‘Les Sept Vieillards’¹² is the fifth poem in the ‘Tableaux parisiens’, the ninetieth piece in *Les Fleurs du mal*, and the immediate antecedent of ‘Les Petites Vieilles’. Following the vision of the tumult and displacement caused by modernization in ‘Le Cygne’ (‘Le vieux Paris n’est plus// (la forme d’une ville | Change plus vite, hélas!// que le cœur d’un mortel)’ (LXXXIX.7-8)), the confrontation with the quasi-hallucinogenic spectacle of seven almost indistinguishable old men destabilizes the narrator’s consciousness, driving him to the brink of madness. A banal street (reminiscent of ‘Le Soleil’, with its ‘vieux faubourg’ (LXXXVII.1)) is transformed into the site of a walking nightmare. Compounding the motif of physical degradation in ‘Le Cygne’ (‘Je pense à la négresse, amaigrie et phtisique, | Piétinant dans la boue’ (LXXXIX.41-42)), the unceasing multiplication of the initial old man is suggestive of the debilitating flows and cyclical processes of metropolitan life during Haussmannization. The poem offers an insight into the infernality of immersion in a city that lacks comforting referents and familiar figures, as identities and sense become blurred.

Five instances of a submerged caesura at the beginning and end of the thirteen quatrains of ‘Les Sept Vieillards’ (two in the opening three quatrains; three in the concluding three quatrains) offer a preliminary indication of the unstable place identity of the piece. The submerged caesura due to the elision of the *e caduc* in the sixth line (‘Les maisons, dont la brume/allongea la hauteur’) signals the spatial uncertainty of the poem, paralleling the transformative effects of the mist on the physical environment of Paris. This emphasis on fluidity in the early stages echoes the foggy atmosphere of the first ‘Spleen’ vignette (‘les faubourgs brumeux’ (LXXV.4)) fifteen poems earlier. Ross Chambers draws attention to the climatic phenomenon with which ‘Les Sept Vieillards’ opens: ‘Baudelaire’s “brouillard sale et jaune [...]” [is] invasive, constrictive, and polluting like dangerous industrial waste’.¹³ Extrapolating this concept of corrupting envelopment, the haze can be interpreted as a product of human action that muddles the spatial referents of the poem. The submerged caesura due to the elision of the *e caduc* at the heart of the ninth line (‘Un brouillard sale et jaune/inondait

¹² Baudelaire, *Œuvres*, pp. 87-88.

¹³ Ross Chambers, ‘Daylight Specter: Baudelaire’s “The Seven Old Men”’, *Yale French Studies*, 125-26 (2014), 45-65 (p. 52).

tout l'espace') perpetuates the fluidity of the forbidding fog, adding to the atmosphere of uncertainty that arises from the narrator's distorted surroundings. Analogous to Haussmann's reconfiguration of the spaces of Paris, the reduced accentuation at the midpoint of the line represents an unsettling diminution of the traditional identity of verse. Rachel Killick focusses on the menace of the tumult in 'Les Sept Vieillards':

'Les Petites Vieilles' et 'À une passante' [...] présentent une expérience urbaine qui, tout en comprenant des éléments inquiétants, permet un enrichissement du moi au contact de l'Autre. En revanche, la ville dans 'Les Sept Vieillards' et 'Les Aveugles' se propose comme un espace hostile qui enlève au narrateur sa liberté d'action, et le confronte au spectacle de sa propre impuissance.¹⁴

The narrator's powerlessness and the escalating instability of the poem are highlighted by the two cases of a submerged caesura (due to the elision of an *e caduc* in the forty-second line; due to liaison in the forty-third line) in the midst of the eleventh quatrain: 'Sosie-inexorable, / ironique-et fatal | Dégoûtant Phénix, fils-et père de lui-même' (42-43). These instances of reduced accentuation at the midpoint of the line insinuate upsets in the place identity of the poem that equate to the homogenizing effects of Haussmann's cyclical reconstruction works on the identity of Paris and its inhabitants. Akin to alterations in the physical space of the city that disturb established patterns of behaviour and movement, the reduced medial accentuation in these two lines disrupts the habitual flow of the alexandrine. Richard Burton claims that 'what the poet encounters in "Les Sept Vieillards" is [...] the sheer otherness [...] of existence, [...] of the city, of other people',¹⁵ foregrounding the feverishness of the poem in the wake of the narrator's flight from the elderly protagonists. The submerged caesura due to the elision of the *e caduc* in the concluding line of the penultimate quatrain underscores the outpouring of distress unleashed by the encounter: 'Blessé par le mystère-et par l'absurdité!' (48). Evoking the destabilizing effects of changes in the architecture of a familiar place, this case of reduced medial accentuation foregrounds the negative consequences of a physical encounter with alterity. The monstrous eruption of the seven old men cannot be rationalized, and poetic space convulses in line with the suffering of the narrator's consciousness.

Five noteworthy cases of elongated phrases and enjambement at key points in the fifty-two lines offer a second marker of the diminished referential framework of 'Les Sept Vieillards'. Following the fluid sketch of the environment in the first three quatrains (prefiguring by fifteen poems the setting of 'Le Vin des chiffonniers' in the 'cœur d'un vieux faubourg' (CV.3)), the arrival of the first old man is remarkable for the extent of the description of the troubling figure, as the enjambement of sense over two quatrains evokes the disjointedness of Parisian life during Haussmannization. The phrase between the subject in the thirteenth line ('un vieillard') and its complementary *passé simple* in the seventeenth line ('M'apparut') encompasses forty-two syllables, warping the thread of the description by elongating it across the stanzaic break. Prosody incarnates the troubled state of the narrator in the unfolding description, as the unsettling versification surrounding the appearance of the old man embodies agitation. Exploring the seven versions of 'Les Sept Vieillards', Felix Leakey notes that 'le ton général du poème [est] déclamatoire et "pathétique"',¹⁶ casting the bleakness of Baudelaire's description of human tragedy in the light of a new kind of urban mythology centred on destabilized souls. From a declamatory perspective, the spatial tension in the poem is augmented by the full-stop that signals a visual break between the third and fourth syllables in the seventeenth line, at which point a liaison elongating the trisyllabic opening

¹⁴ Rachel Killick, 'Espaces du moi, espaces de la ville: Forme et signification dans quatre poèmes des "Tableaux parisiens"', *Essays in French Literature*, 39 (2002), 153-70 (p. 161).

¹⁵ Richard D. E. Burton, *Baudelaire in 1859: A Study in the Sources of Poetic Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 120-21.

¹⁶ Felix W. Leakey, *Baudelaire: Collected Essays, 1953-1988*, ed. by E. Jacobs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 145 ['Les Sept Versions des *Sept Vieillards*'].

phrase should occur: ‘M’apparut–On’. Muting the [t] as indicated by the punctuation would produce an awkward hiatus, but the atmosphere of unease does not disappear if the full-stop is overridden. The liaison after the third syllable of the seventeenth line triggers an unpunctuated phrase of fifteen syllables involving enjambement that leads to the semi-colon marking the *rejet* in the eighteenth line: ‘M’apparut–On eût dit sa prunelle trempée | Dans le fiel; son regard aiguissait les frimas’ (17-18). The lack of pause at the end of the seventeenth line entails the absence of a traditional prosodic referent, adding to the placelessness of the poetic space. The fifth quatrain divides into six unequal phrases (15+9+6+6+4+8), insinuating the debilitated state of Baudelaire’s verse in a manner that parallels the narrator’s unease. If the classical alexandrine is taken as a figuration of the form of old Paris, the enjambement at the end of the twenty-first line (‘Il n’était pas voûté, // mais cassé, son échine | Faisant avec sa jambe–un parfait angle droit’ (21-22)) incarnates Haussmann’s unsettling attempts to remodel an established structure, since the *contre-rejet* unbalances the unequivocal caesura of the twenty-first line. Heeding Graham Chesters’s concept that ‘dramatic energy strains the limits of verse’,¹⁷ the transgression of the stanzaic break due to the enjambement between the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth lines (‘Lui donnait la tournure–et le pas maladroit | D’un quadrupède–infirmes–ou d’un juif à trois pattes’) indicates a fracture in the prosodic bounds of the piece. The beginning of the seventh quatrain thus demonstrates the warping effect of an encounter with alterity, hinting at the effects of Haussmannization on Parisians’ lives. Rachel Killick contends that ‘Baudelaire’s great achievement is [...] to have made the challenges and vicissitudes of versification an integral and organic part of his reflection on the human condition’,¹⁸ evoking correspondences between the disrupted rhythms of the ‘Tableaux parisiens’ and the difficulties of life in modernizing Paris. Comprising a 6+2+6+10 phrasal division due to the enjambement and three commas, the disjointedness of the exclamation in the concluding two lines (‘Et mon âme dansait, // dansait, vieille gabarre | Sans mâts, sur une mer monstrueuse–et sans bords!’ (51-52)) is suffused with the effects of placelessness on Baudelaire’s verse. The corrupted poetic space of ‘Les Sept Vieillards’ goes awry, as the piece closes with the evocation of unbounded fluidity caused by a dearth of reassuring referents.

The final stage in this overview of prosodic indicators of placelessness in ‘Les Sept Vieillards’ is concerned with six instances of less harmonious *rimes croisées* (four *rimes suffisantes*; two *rimes pauvres*) in the first half. The atmosphere of uncertainty related to the expanding tendrils of the fog in the second quatrain (‘Les maisons, dont la brume–allongeait la hauteur, | Simulaient les deux quais d’une rivière–accrue’ (6-7)) is compounded by the dissonance of the feminine *rime suffisante* between ‘la triste rue’ (5) and ‘une rivière–accrue’ (7). The meagre rhyme imbues the poem with a feeling of unease relating to the tormenting presence of the old men (the possibility of acoustic reinforcement in [i] and [Ry] offers a trace of a richer alternative rhyme that is muddled by the uneasy pairing). The following feminine *rime suffisante* between ‘inondait tout l’espace’ (9) and ‘mon âme déjà lasse’ (11) augments the sensation that the fabric of the poem is decomposing, as the weakening of its prosodic referents hints at the unsettling effects of Haussmann’s restructuring works on the physical environment. Patrick Labarthe proposes that ‘les paysages urbains renvoient la conscience baudelairienne à la mémoire de la seule configuration qui au total lui importe, celle de la misère des êtres contristés et souffrants’.¹⁹ The poetic space of ‘Les Sept Vieillards’ is infused with an atmosphere of unease that is indicative of the anguish arising from the reduced place identity of transitioning Paris. In the fourth quatrain, the masculine *rime pauvre* between ‘ce ciel pluvieux’ (14)

¹⁷ Graham Chesters, *Baudelaire and the Poetics of Craft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 159.

¹⁸ Rachel Killick, ‘Baudelaire’s Versification: Conservative or Radical?’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Baudelaire*, ed. by R. Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 51-68 (p. 66).

¹⁹ Patrick Labarthe, ‘Locus amoenus, locus terribilis dans l’œuvre de Baudelaire’, *Revue d’histoire littéraire de la France*, 99 (1999), 1021-45 (p. 1045).

and ‘dans ses yeux’ (16) is suggestive of the effects of environmental upset, as the dearth of identical phonemes in the pairing diminishes the supporting structure of rhyming resonance offered by more traditional verse. Corresponding to the changes in existence resulting from the reconfiguration of Parisian spaces, the deficiency of the rhyme highlights the reduction of reassuring referents entailed in structural alterations. For Rosemary Lloyd, “‘Les Sept Vieillards’ reveals [the extent to which] the multiple, anonymous other that the city dweller repeatedly encounters forces a constant awareness of the contingency of human existence’.”²⁰ The escalating peculiarity of the place identity of the poem is cemented by the extreme poverty of the rhymes in the fifth quatrain (they are among the poorest of the piece): ‘sa prunelle trempée’ (17) and ‘roide comme une épée’ (19) form a feminine *rime suffisante* that melancholically echoes the boisterous rhyming swordplay of the narrator in ‘Le Soleil’ (‘ma fantasque-escrime’ (LXXXVII.5)); ‘aiguissait les frimas’ (18) and ‘celle de Judas’ (20) form a masculine *rime pauvre* that offers a disconcerting depiction of misery, linking a climatic phenomenon with underhanded behaviour. These two meagre rhymes indicate the debilitation of poetic space, perpetuating the sensation that an encounter with alterity leads to disruptions in identity (the echo of ‘Le Soleil’ in the feminine rhyme augments the atmosphere of destabilization because the majority of rhymes in the piece that occurs three places earlier in the ‘Tableaux parisiens’ are very harmonious). In the seventh quatrain, the elderly protagonist’s trudge through glutinous mud is figured by the masculine *rime suffisante* between ‘il allait s’empêtrant’ (26) and ‘plutôt qu’indifférent’ (28), indicating volatility in verse that is analogous to the disturbed land of a construction site. Evoking the intertwinement of poetic consciousness and the physicality of the mutating city at the heart of the ‘Tableaux parisiens’, Peter Broome asserts that ‘the actual mud of city streets, as well as that of human nature, [...] forms part of [Baudelaire’s] raw materials’.²¹ Extrapolating this concept of Baudelaire shaping his poetry around the elements of his context, the form and content of ‘Les Sept Vieillards’ can be perceived as significantly affected by environmental factors. This keystone piece of innovative verse bears the traces of an older incarnation of Paris that clashes with the forces of modernity, disfiguring the neo-classicism of the alexandrine. The heart of the ‘Tableaux parisiens’ thus symbolizes the dissonant alterity of a world that is disappearing because of modernization.

***Les Fleurs du mal*, XCI, ‘Les Petites Vieilles’**

Building on the exemplars of placelessness in ‘Les Sept Vieillards’, let us turn to ‘Les Petites Vieilles’,²² the sixth poem in the ‘Tableaux parisiens’, and the ninety-first piece in *Les Fleurs du mal*. Emerging from the agitation provoked by the encounter with the seven old men in the preceding poem, the description of the little old women illuminates the stakes of urban life during Haussmannization at greater length. Marked by a tension between tradition and modernity, the four parts encompass allusions to tradition and contemporaneous concerns: the first section enumerates the movements of the old women in the troubling city, broaching the spectacle of their misfortune; the refinement of the classical world evoked in the second section precedes a focus on a lone woman in the third section; the fourth section offers an appreciation of the disregarded worth of the women.

The opening line of Baudelaire’s quadripartite meditation on the fate of elderly Parisian women evokes a tortuous urban topography: ‘Dans les plis sinueux des vieilles capitales’. The two adjectives depicting the twisting coils of old cities straining at their symbolic limits mark a tension between older sinuous streets and modern cannon-shot boulevards that is heightened by the intertwining effect of the *rimes croisées*. Disjuncture is emphasized in the sixth and seventh lines, as the enjambement creates an embedded alexandrine between the two exclamation marks: ‘Éponine-ou

²⁰ Rosemary Lloyd, ‘Engendering Performance in *Les Fleurs du mal*’, *Dix-Neuf*, 17 (2013), 24-36 (p. 28).

²¹ Peter Broome, *Baudelaire’s Poetic Patterns: The Secret Language of ‘Les Fleurs du mal’* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), p. 467.

²² Baudelaire, *Œuvres*, pp. 89-91.

Lais!// Monstres brisés, bossus | Ou tordus,—aimons-les!// ce sont encor des âmes'. Epitomizing the monstrous descriptions of the tricolon of adjectives (foregrounded by the plosive alliteration in [b] of the first two), the spatial referents of the piece begin to blur. According to Ellen Burt, 'Baudelaire [...] understood [...] the fit between the poem and the modern experience of the loss of experience'.²³ The distortion of poetic space in 'Les Petites Vieilles' evokes the loss of old Paris and its wealth of experiences, as modernity compels alterations in the forms of the physical environment and prosody. The escalating volatility of the piece is highlighted by the stanzaic enjambement at the end of the second quatrain (prefiguring a similar absence of pause at the end of the fourth quatrain): 'Sous des jupons troués/et sous de froids tissus | Ils rampent' (8-9). The lack of phrasal markers foregrounds the dehumanization of the women as 'monstres' (5) in the destabilizing space of the city. In the fourth quatrain, the opulent feminine *rime léonine* between 'marionnettes' (13) and 'sonnettes' (15) alludes to disconcerting degradation whereby the women are reduced to mechanical simulacra. Echoing the narrator's torment at the end of 'Les Sept Vieillards' ('Et mon âme dansait, // dansait' (XC.51)), the absence of agency in the actions of the female figures is highlighted by the modulation of 'dansent' (15) into 'sans vouloir danser' (15). The play in the form of the verb acoustically insinuates the possibility of the infinitive being taken as a plural imperative, 'dansez' (a traditional interpretation of the line with medial accentuation augments this possibility), hinting at the manipulative powers of the society that shapes the world of the old women. Steven Miles asserts that 'the physical environment, the cityscapes increasingly dominated by spaces for consumption, constitute[s] a graphic manifestation of the changing nature of selfhood and the changing ways in which the individual relates to society'.²⁴ This entwinement of alterations in identity with structural modifications in urban spaces can be extrapolated to account for changes in verse. Insinuated in the imagery of the eighth quatrain ('Combien de fois [...] l'ouvrier varie | La forme de la boîte/où l'on met tous ces corps' (31-32)), the rise of consumptive behaviour in Haussmannian Paris is an important factor in the mutations of Baudelaire's poetic space. The demand for novelty in consumerist ideologies not only acts as a driver for progress in the world of the 'fracas roulant des omnibus' (10), but also provokes disregard for outdated models (evoked in the disparagement of the old women as spectres of a bygone age in the seventeenth quatrain: 'Vous qui fûtes la grâce/ou qui fûtes la gloire, | Nul ne vous reconnaît!' (65-66)). At the end of the fourth quatrain, the material degradation caused by urbanization is focalized by the stanzaic enjambement that augments the import of the trisyllabic phrase after the exclamation mark in the sixteenth line ('Tout cassés | Qu'ils sont' (16-17)), emphasizing the extent to which the old women have been broken by urban existence. In the seventh quatrain, the two instances of enjambement and multiple liaisons reinforce the intimation in the ant-based depiction ('le fourmillant tableau' (26)), charged with reminiscences of 'Les Sept Vieillards' ('Fourmillante cité, // cité pleine de rêves' (XC.1)), that the fluidity of urban life triggers homogenization and diminished identities. Killick alludes to recurrent issues of diversity and space in 'Les Petites Vieilles':

Le poème suscite d'emblée une réflexion sur le groupe en tant que tel, et sur les différents individus qui le composent, laissant ainsi prévoir ou bien une exploration multiple de l'espace occupé par une série de vies diverses, ou bien une réduction, peut-être appauvrissante, où les différences individuelles s'abolissent dans le nivellement d'une seule expérience commune.²⁵

The concluding quatrains of the first part display prosodic particularities that mimic the manner in which 'l'ouvrier varie | La forme de la boîte/où l'on met tous ces corps' (31-32). The disordered phrasal division of the eighth quatrain (3+9+12+24) emphasizes the 'membres discords' (30) of the

²³ Ellen S. Burt, 'Out of Time: *Today* in "Les Yeux des pauvres"', *Yale French Studies*, 125-26 (2014), 183-99 (p. 183).

²⁴ Steven Miles, *Spaces for Consumption: Pleasure and Placelessness in the Post-Industrial City* (London: Sage, 2010), p. 10.

²⁵ Killick, 'Espaces du moi', p. 155.

women's bodies, as the masculine *rime riche* between 'discords' (30) and 'corps' (32) foregrounds the disfiguration of form, alluding to the tumult of Haussmann's reconfiguration works.

Traces of increasing instability emerge at the beginning of the second part. The eighteen-syllable phrase running from the *contre-rejet* after the unequivocal caesura in the thirty-ninth line through the submerged caesura (due to liaison) in the fortieth line points to the unpredictability of the meandering description: 'célèbre-évanouie | Que Tivoli jadis-ombragea dans sa fleur' (39-40). The parodic tenor of the masculine *rime riche* between 'miel' (42) and 'ciel' (44) is underscored by the dissonance of the feminine *rime suffisante* between 'ces êtres frêles' (41) and 'ailes' (43), as part of a quasi-homogenization of rhyming phonemes that perpetuates the diminution of identity in the first part. At the conclusion of the three-quatrain section, the spatial referents of the poem are distorted due to the sudden dissolution of the classical ambience established by the evocation of Vestal Virgins and priestesses of Thalia in the tenth quatrain: 'De Frascati défunt Vestale-enamourée; | Prêtresse de Thalie, hélas!' (37-38). Broome highlights the 'series of quick alternating swings in the face of these disconcerting creatures, human and less than human, distant yet ominously near, alien yet fraught with threatening personal implications, laughable yet frightening'.²⁶ The rapidity of the shift from the classicism in the second part to concerns of belonging and identity after the midpoint of the poem represents an unsettling displacement, as the narrator returns his attention to the devalued old women in the disquieting spaces of modernizing Paris. Echoing 'Harmonie du soir' ('Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige' (XLVII.12)) forty-four poems earlier, the opening quatrain of the third section portrays a solitary old woman bathed in a crimson sunset: 'le soleil tombant | Ensanglante le ciel de blessures vermeilles' (50-51). Her lonely position as a figure of alterity 'à l'écart sur un banc' (52) not only evokes the increasing disconnectedness of urban existence during the Second Empire, but also heralds escalating disturbance in poetic space. The enjambement and two cases of a submerged caesura (due to the elision of an *e caduc* in the fiftieth line; because of liaison in the fifty-second line) framing the depiction of the blood-red dusk underline the volatility of the narrative. In the fourteenth quatrain, the lack of temporal specificity surrounding the concert of the soldier-musicians is matched by topographic imprecision ('sur un banc' (52); 'nos jardins' (54)) that is emphasized by the submerged caesura (due to liaison) in the fifty-fourth line: 'Dont les soldats parfois-inondent nos jardins'. The description is immersed in an atmosphere of atemporality and placelessness, as the diminished harmoniousness of the masculine *rime suffisante* between 'jardins' (54) and 'citadins' (56) evokes the increasing artificiality of the lone woman's urban environment (the possibility of acoustic reinforcement in [a(R)] hints at a richer alternative rhyme struggling to emerge from the pairing of two nouns bearing overtones of artifice).

The fourth section begins with a quatrain implying that urban existence involves acute suffering: 'vous cheminez, // stoïques et sans plaintes | [...] | Mères au cœur saignant, // courtisanes ou saintes' (61-63). Alison Fairlie declares that 'the old women are both battered by the elements of nature and terrorized by the civilization of the city'.²⁷ From an ecocritical perspective, the sixteenth quatrain contains the most striking rhyme of the poem: the masculine *rime léonine* between the sixty-second and sixty-fourth lines ('À travers le chaos des vivantes cités' (62); 'Dont autrefois les noms par tous étaient cités' (64)) insinuates that the fortunes of the old women are diminished by the metrocentrism of the latter half of the nineteenth century. In the sixty-fifth line, the bygone grandeur of the women (and of the old structures of Paris) is evoked by the repetition of the second-person-plural form of the *passé simple* framing the submerged caesura (due to the elision of the *e caduc*): 'Vous qui fûtes la grâce-ou qui fûtes la gloire' (65). James Hiddleston asserts that the elderly women are 'all the more bizarre, astonishing, unreal, and "shocking" [...] since [...] their alienation within the false security of an allegedly familiar urban environment can [...] be said to be total, absolute'.²⁸ In

²⁶ Broome, *Poetic Patterns*, p. 480.

²⁷ Alison Fairlie, *Baudelaire: 'Les Fleurs du mal'* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), p. 19.

²⁸ James A. Hiddleston, *Baudelaire and the Art of Memory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 220-21.

the twentieth quatrain, the topsy-turvy world of Paris during Haussmannization is associated with the loss of human decency and the impoverished lives of the old women by the masculine *rime pauvre* between ‘perdus’ (78) and ‘vertus’ (80), involving an acoustic peculiarity that evokes the restrictiveness of traditional versification. The disyllabic words share high indistinguishable sound-patterns ([t] is the unvoiced echo of the voiced [d]) that almost create a *rime léonine*, yet a purist assessment based on identical phonemes determines that the rhyme is weak. This singularity suggests that the destabilization of physical space leads to a reconfiguration of poetic space. The representation of virtue by the unvoiced echo of the voiced phoneme related to loss augments the impression of decaying societal and poetic systems, prefiguring the transition to the new forms of expression offered by *vers libéré*. The final quatrain is marked by two instances of a submerged caesura (due to the elision of an *e caduc*) that evoke fluidity and volatility: ‘Ruines! ma famille!—ô cerveaux congénères!’ (81); ‘la griffe—effroyable de Dieu’ (84). The animalistic depiction of the Christian deity in the eighty-fourth line compounds the pathos-imbued apostrophe in the eighty-first line, engendering an ambience of hopelessness in relation to the destabilization of traditional referents for society and poetry. Emphasizing the uncertainty of the future of humanity in the era of Haussmannization, the ending crowns the transitional mood of the post-Hugolian triptych inaugurated by ‘Le Cygne’ (‘Le vieux Paris n’est plus// (la forme d’une ville | Change plus vite, hélas!// que le cœur d’un mortel)’ (LXXXIX.7-8)). Paralleling the transformation of city-dwellers into displaced and homogenized quasi-spectres in their own habitat, poetic space becomes as unsettling (and as difficult to navigate) as its physical counterpart.

Conclusions

Theories of place identity illuminate the link between the uneasy atmosphere of the ‘Tableaux parisiens’ and the changing configuration of Paris during Haussmannization. Approaching Baudelaire’s verse from an ecocritical perspective allows us to contemplate the psychological torment and existential strife of ‘Les Sept Vieillards’ and ‘Les Petites Vieilles’ in a manner that underscores the unsettling effects of modernization on Parisians. A focus on the instabilities in these two poems foregrounds the significance of demolition and reconstruction works in shaping cultural production as much as physical space. Stacy Alaimo asserts that ‘the human body is vulnerable to the substances and flows of its environments, which may include industrial environments and their social/economic forces’.²⁹ The atmosphere of transience and volatility in ‘Les Sept Vieillards’ and ‘Les Petites Vieilles’ highlights a peculiar kind of upset linked to environmental upheaval in Paris whereby the materiality of verse is affected by the shifting forces and flows of Haussmannization. The structure of the poems indicates a rupture that can be related to the demolition of time-weathered referents in the physical incarnation of the French capital. Encompassing submerged caesurae, disjointed phrasing and disconcerting contrasts in rhyme strength, the two pieces evoke disorientation arising from dissolving place identities. Broome emphasizes ‘the distracted din of human life [...], flooding the city with its directionless cacophony’.³⁰ The peculiar prosody of the diptych foregrounds the effects of encountering alterity in a world marked by forces of progress that threaten cultural memories. The difficult transition to modernity during the Second Empire is represented through mutating versification that is as much in flux as the environment articulated by it. Heeding Fairlie’s avowal that ‘in Baudelaire’s lines, every touch brings alive both a physical and a mental sense of the grotesque and the pitiful’,³¹ the prosody of two of the most advanced vignettes in the ‘Tableaux parisiens’ is suggestive of the perturbing circumstances of life in the metamorphosing metropolis. Marked by troubling structural changes that augment an eerie atmosphere of alterity, ‘Les Sept Vieillards’ and ‘Les Petites Vieilles’ provoke unshakeable unease about the estranging effects of modernization.

²⁹ Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 28.

³⁰ Broome, *Poetic Patterns*, pp. 503-04.

³¹ Fairlie, *Baudelaire*, 19.

Destabilizing alterations in the physical space of Haussmannian Paris can be linked to increased volatility in Baudelaire's verse on the basis that the reduction in familiarity caused by topographic placelessness involves a diminution of referents paralleling the escalating flexibility of poetic forms in the latter half of the century. The descriptions of the marginalized and unnerving protagonists in 'Les Sept Vieillards' and 'Les Petites Vieilles' bear the marks of the unnatural processes and constraints of metropolitan existence in the industrialized era. Steeped in an atmosphere of blurred referents and identities, the dissonances in the verse of the two poems can be envisioned as corresponding to the mutations of the city. Michel de Certeau conceptualizes the metropolis as a quasi-ecological nexus that is constantly reconstituting itself: 'l'errance que multiplie et rassemble la ville en fait une immense expérience sociale de la privation de lieu - une expérience [...] effritée en déportations innombrables et infimes (déplacements et marches), compensée par les relations et les croisements de ces exodes qui font entrelacs, créant un tissu urbain'.³² Baudelaire's advanced verse can be perceived as an ecosystem involving multifarious singularities (prosodic particularities) situated in existential spheres (lines of verse). As spheres are distorted because singularities warp their boundaries, separate worlds begin to fuse, creating the possibility of intermingling and evolution. Composed against the backdrop of Haussmann altering the topographic referents by which city-dwellers navigate, the peculiar prosody of 'Les Sept Vieillards' and 'Les Petites Vieilles' heightens our awareness that elements of verse not only affect neighbouring lines, but also evoke changes in humanity's surroundings. The application of a psychogeographical framework to the shifting rhythms and rhymes of *Les Fleurs du mal* sheds light on the links between environmental factors and the forms of cultural production, encouraging greater consideration of the potential of ecocritical paradigms to inform studies of poetry.

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³² Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien*, ed. by L. Giard, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1990-94), I (1990), 155.